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IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC DIRECTION FOR COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT IN CARDINGTON, OHIO - A SUMMARY

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IN CARDINGTON, OHIO - A SUMMARY

by
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A better understanding of the community was the basic objective of the Cardington study conducted by the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center and the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service with the cooperation of the Cardington village council and Community Study Advisory Committee. This understanding was planned to be developed through three basic steps: (1) collection of data from people in the community, former residents of the community and realtors in neighboring communities; (2) involvement of a study advisory committee in development of the study and discussion of the implications of the study results; and (3) follow-up activities in the community oriented to problem areas identified through the study and advisory committee discussions. The first two steps have been completed. The objective of this summary is to assist those in the community involved in the third step.

This summary includes only some highlights of the study. A detailed description of the study and its results are included in the thesis of Robert Jenkins entitled, "Identifying Specific Direction for Community Improvement in Cardington, Ohio -- A Case Study of an Ohio Rural Village."

Background on the Study

The objectives of the study were oriented to providing public decision-makers and community leaders in Cardington with a better understanding of their community. More specifically, the concern was the determination of specific directions for community improvement through the identification of priorities as perceived by local residents.

The data were gathered from three basic sources: Cardington residents, former Cardington residents and realtors in neighboring communities. Cardington resi-

dents were included to obtain a current reading on how various groups viewed the community. Former residents were included because of a concern in the community with residents, and in particular younger residents, leaving the community. There was a desire to understand both the characteristics of the people leaving the community and the reasons for their leaving. Neighboring community realtors were included to gain an understanding of how persons outside the community viewed Cardington as a possible community for establishing a residence. Realtors appeared to be a good source of such information because of their contact with people in the process of choosing among several possible communities. For those interested in more detail, an appendix is attached which explains how people were selected for the study and the number interviewed.

In this summary of the study, the major concern is "what have we learned that will be helpful?" Therefore, the discussion highlights the following areas of interest: resident characteristics, community characteristics, former residents, realtors, priorities for community improvement and variation in opinions of residents interviewed.

Resident Characteristics

Some general background information about the people living in Cardington helps to better understand the community and what its residents are likely to want from the community.

Ninety heads of household were interviewed. Their average age was 51, 86 percent were male, 83 percent married, 80 percent were employed full time, only 2 percent were unemployed and looking for work, and 43 percent worked in Cardington. The average length of residence in Cardington was 28 years. There was an average of 3.6 persons per household. Surprisingly, 48 percent of the households had a gross income of \$10,000 or more. Only 11 percent of the households had a gross income of less than \$4,000.

Thirty-two spouses of the heads of household were employed full-time. Only 2.5 percent were unemployed and looking for work. The average weekly gross earnings of the employed spouses was \$121.94.

Fifty-nine percent of the high school seniors were born outside Morrow County as compared to 62 percent of the heads of household and 70 percent of the spouses. Forty-four percent of the students were enrolled in a general course, 30 percent in a commercial course, 19 percent in a college preparatory course and 7 percent in a vocational course. The students rated job opportunities as the most important community characteristic influencing their choice of a community in which to live. Health services, housing and friendliness were also mentioned as relatively important considerations.

Assessment of Community Characteristics

High school students, heads of household and spouses were asked to rate several characteristics of Cardington on the basis of poor, fair, good or excellent. Ratings were assigned the numbers one through four; one corresponding to the lowest rating and four corresponding to the highest rating. Employment opportunities, health services, recreation facilities, the village police and the appearance of the downtown area clearly received the least positive assessments (Table 1).

Although few of the residents interviewed were unemployed and looking for work, they were nevertheless concerned about employment opportunities in Cardington. The fact that less than half of the heads of household worked in Cardington, taken in combination with the low rating given employment opportunities in Cardington, may mean that there is a desire on the part of a substantial number of people to work in Cardington. Respondents seldomly mentioned the excellent employment opportunities in neighboring communities. Similarly, the fact that health services are generally available in neighboring communities was

Table 1
Resident Assessments of Community Characteristics
Cardington, 1973

Characteristic	Average Rating*
Full-time Employment Opportunities in Cardington	1.23
Health Services	1.35
Part-time Employment Opportunities in Cardington	1.65
Recreation Facilities	1.67
Village Police	1.88
Appearance of the Downtown Area	1.90
Housing	2.30
Street Lighting	2.58
Newspaper	2.75
Phone Service	2.75
Garbage Collection	2.84
Secondary Schools	2.98
Water Service	3.03
Primary Schools	3.10
Fire Protection	3.13
Electricity	3.20
Emergency Medical Care	3.37

* 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = excellent

SOURCE: Survey Data.

overshadowed by a concern that the services were not available in Cardington.

Former Residents

Thirty former residents were interviewed by telephone. They had left Cardington for a variety of reasons. The three most mentioned reasons for leaving were better job, closer to work, and married and moved away. Seventy-three percent of those who left moved to other places in Ohio. The former residents interviewed had lived in Cardington an average of 15 years and their average age was 34. Seventy percent of the former residents mentioned the people of Cardington and the small town atmosphere as things they liked most about Cardington. "Nothing to do" was the most commonly mentioned (43 percent) thing they liked least about Cardington.

Former residents also were asked to assess the community on the basis of the 17 characteristics shown in Table 1. There were differences in average assessments between residents and former residents for 9 of the 17 characteristics. The evaluations reflected some of the recent changes in fire protection, water service and police protection.

Realtors

The major reason for contacting realtors in neighboring communities was to determine their attitudes toward Cardington and their assessment of the housing situation in Cardington. These realtors were generally positive about Cardington. Eight of the ten realtors interviewed stated that there is a strong demand for housing in Cardington. A strong demand was defined as sale of 10 to 12 houses per year. Seven realtors stated that people searching for a new house in Cardington are willing to pay between \$15,000 and \$30,000. Five realtors suggested that Cardington needs to build new houses ranging in price from \$15,000 to \$20,000. Seven realtors indicated that Cardington could build new homes ranging in price

from \$25,000 to \$30,000. Most realtors expressed a positive attitude toward the availability of financing in Cardington. However, they also believed that it was much easier to obtain financing for homes in Mt. Gilead, Marion and Galion than in Cardington.

Priorities for Community Improvement

Residents were asked to assess ten possible priorities for community improvement. The possible ratings of the priorities were very high, high, medium and low. These choices were assigned numbers one through four; one corresponding to the highest assessment and four corresponding to the lowest. The ranking of the ten priorities is shown in Table 2. The most frequently mentioned priorities were: the need to increase employment opportunities, improvement in police protection and the need for a youth center. For the remaining priorities, the results show that there was no clear cut order for each priority. However, the findings demonstrate that the remaining priorities are of importance to Cardington residents since the average assessments were all relatively high.

Variations in Opinions

One of the major concerns expressed by the study advisory committee was the possible variation in opinions of various groups regarding community characteristics and priorities for improvement. However, relatively little variation in opinion was found in the community. The data were examined to determine if there was a relationship between assessment of community characteristics and any of the following: age, years of education, length of residence, income level, sex and occupation. Generally speaking, these factors did not influence resident assessment of community characteristics. The only exceptions were age and income for a few of the community characteristics. Younger residents and higher income residents were less satisfied with the community.

Table 2
Rankings of Ten Priorities for Community Improvement
Cardington, 1973

Priority	Rank
Increasing Employment Opportunities	1
Village Police	2
Youth Center	2
Removal of Run-Down Buildings	4
Remodeling of the Downtown Area	4
Children Recreation Facilities	4
Family Housing	4
Improvement in Community Attitudes	4
Zoning	9
Housing for the Elderly	9

SOURCE: Survey Data.

The same factors mentioned in the previous paragraph were also analyzed to determine their relationship with priorities considered important. The 20-39 age group and the 40-59 age group expressed more concern with employment opportunities than the other age groups. Respondents with a household income of greater than \$10,000 per year more frequently ranked increasing employment high as compared to the under \$10,000 income group. With respect to education, the respondents with more than twelve years of school completed expressed more concern with employment opportunities than those with twelve years or less of school completed. This does not necessarily mean that they were personally more concerned with jobs, but they did see jobs as a community concern.

The 20-39 age group placed a higher priority on a youth center than the other age groups. The respondents in the over \$10,000 income group more frequently indicated the need for a youth center than the respondents in the under \$10,000 income group.

Additional Observations

It may be helpful to mention three additional observations that we have made based on the data of this study and our contacts with the community.

First, there are not major areas of disagreement within the community concerning its characteristics or those things which should be given priority for community improvement. Although the older residents tended to be more optimistic about the community, there was a general positive attitude among all age groups. Sex, occupation, income and education generally made little difference in how people responded to questions about community characteristics and priorities. This general agreement within the community should facilitate the planning of community improvement projects.

Second, residents of Cardington had some definite and well-defined ties to Cardington. For example, analysis of shopping patterns showed a definite

tie to the community. These ties and pride in the community may be very helpful in developing support for community improvement projects.

Third, there is a general feeling that Cardington was better in the "good old days." Some of the respondents with whom we talked emphasized that Cardington has lost ground relative to neighboring communities. This should not necessarily be interpreted as negative feelings toward the community, but rather an indication of concern among some residents about the progress Cardington may or may not have made in recent years.

Appendix - Sample Selection

Residents of Cardington in the study were interviewed personally during November and December 1973. The resident sample was divided into several groups based on age and marital status. The groups were:

17 - 18, unmarried
20 - 39, married
40 - 59, married
60 or older, married or unmarried.

The youngest group consisted of all high school seniors resident in Cardington. The group was assumed to be representative of the 17-19 year old unmarried residents of the community. This group was included to get an understanding of those people about to make decisions concerning whether or not to remain in Cardington as they entered a stage of their lives independent of their parents. The remaining three groups consisted of heads of household and their spouses. To determine which residents in these groups would be interviewed, three random samples of 30 heads of household each were selected from a list of the 528 households in Cardington. Three different age groups were included because of an interest in how age influenced various characteristics and attitudes of residents. A sample of 30 former residents was randomly selected from a list of 65 people who had left the community during the past seven years. Each of the 30 was interviewed by telephone. Ten realtors listing properties in the Cardington areas were also personally interviewed.